Amendments to the Claims:

1. – 4. (Canceled).

5. (Previously presented) A method for reducing noise in a digital image formed from a plurality of pixels including a given pixel, the method comprising the steps of:

computing global statistics from the image;

computing local statistics for the given pixel;

configuring a local filter using the local and global statistics;

filtering the given pixel using the local filter to reduce image noise;

wherein the step of computing the local statistics for the given pixel further includes the steps of:

selecting a window containing the given pixel and a plurality of neighboring pixels;

computing a 2-D local variance of the given pixel based on information related to the pixels in the window;

computing a plurality of 1-D local variances along multiple directions through the given pixel in the window; and

detecting a local edge direction by selecting one of the directions with the smallest 1-D local variance,

wherein the step of configuring the local filter using the local and global statistics includes the steps of:

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selecting the detected local edge direction L as the direction of the local filter;

for the detected local edge direction L, computing a 1-D filter strength as a function of a square root of a local variance and a global noise standard deviation;

computing a 2-D filter strength as a function of the local variance and the global noise standard deviation; and

configuring the local filter for the detected local edge direction L based on the 1-D and 2-D filter strengths.

6. (Previously presented) The method of claim 5, wherein the step of configuring the local filter using the local and global statistics further includes the steps of:

selecting the detected local edge direction L_k (k = 1, 2, 3, or 4) as the direction of the local filter;

for the detected local edge direction L_k, computing the 1-D filter strength $\alpha_k = \min(2\sigma, \max(3\sigma - \sigma_k, 0))/(2\sigma)$ wherein σ is the global noise standard deviation, and σ_k is the square root of the local variance (k = 1, 2, 3, or 4);

computing the 2-D filter strength $\alpha_0 = \min(2\sigma, \max(3\sigma - \sigma_0, 0))/(2\sigma)$ wherein σ_0 is a square root of a 2-D local variance; and

configuring the local filter f_k for the detected local edge direction L_k according to the following conditions, wherein α_k is the filter strength along the local edge direction L_k [k = 0 (non-edge), 1 (horizontal), 2 (vertical), 3 (upper left to lower right, 4 (upper right to lower left)]:

(i)   if the detected direction is L_1, then f_1 is configured as a 2-D local

filter for horizontal direction, wherein:

$$f_1 = \frac{1}{9}\begin{bmatrix} \alpha_0 & \alpha_0 & \alpha_0 \\ \alpha_0 + 3\alpha_1(1-\alpha_0) & \alpha_0 + 3(3-2\alpha_1)(1-\alpha_0) & \alpha_0 + 3\alpha_1(1-\alpha_0) \\ \alpha_0 & \alpha_0 & \alpha_0 \end{bmatrix};$$

(ii)   if the detected direction is L_2, then f_2 is configured as a 2-D local

filter for vertical direction, wherein:

$$f_2 = \frac{1}{9}\begin{bmatrix} \alpha_0 & \alpha_0 + 3\alpha_2(1-\alpha_0) & \alpha_0 \\ \alpha_0 & \alpha_0 + 3(3-2\alpha_2)(1-\alpha_0) & \alpha_0 \\ \alpha_0 & \alpha_0 + 3\alpha_2(1-\alpha_0) & \alpha_0 \end{bmatrix};$$

(iii)   if the detected direction is L_3, then f_3 is configured as a 2-D local

filter for the diagonal direction from upper left to lower right, wherein:

$$f_3 = \frac{1}{9}\begin{bmatrix} \alpha_0 + 3\alpha_3(1-\alpha_0) & \alpha_0 & \alpha_0 \\ \alpha_0 & \alpha_0 + 3(3-2\alpha_3)(1-\alpha_0) & \alpha_0 \\ \alpha_0 & \alpha_0 & \alpha_0 + 3\alpha_3(1-\alpha_0) \end{bmatrix}; \text{ and}$$

(iv)   if the detected direction is L_4, then f_4 is configured as a 2-D local

filter for the diagonal direction from upper right to lower left, wherein:

$$f_4 = \frac{1}{9}\begin{bmatrix} \alpha_0 & \alpha_0 & \alpha_0 + 3\alpha_4(1-\alpha_0) \\ \alpha_0 & \alpha_0 + 3(3-2\alpha_4)(1-\alpha_0) & \alpha_0 \\ \alpha_0 + 3\alpha_4(1-\alpha_0) & \alpha_0 & \alpha_0 \end{bmatrix}.$$

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7. (Previously presented) A method for reducing noise in a digital image formed from a plurality of pixels including a given pixel, the method comprising the steps of:

computing global statistics from the image;

computing local statistics for the given pixel;

configuring a local filter using the local and global statistics;

filtering the given pixel using the local filter to reduce image noise;

wherein the step of computing the local statistics for the given pixel further includes the steps of:

selecting a window containing the given pixel and a plurality of neighboring pixels;

computing a 2-D local variance of the given pixel based on information related to the pixels in the window;

computing a plurality of 1-D local variances along multiple directions through the given pixel in the window; and

detecting a local edge direction by selecting one of the directions with the smallest 1-D local variance,

wherein the step of computing the global statistics comprises the step of estimating a global noise standard deviation σ to generate the global statistics,

wherein the step of estimating the global noise standard deviation σ further includes the steps of:

dividing the input image into overlapping or non-overlapping blocks;

computing a mean and a standard deviation for each block;

finding the smallest standard deviation d_0 and its corresponding mean

m_0;

detecting block saturation due to noise;

compensating for the smallest standard deviation d_0 to generate a

compensated smallest standard deviation $\tilde{d}_0$;

selecting the block standard deviations d_n that are within a range of the

compensated smallest standard deviation $\tilde{d}_0$; and

averaging the selected block standard deviations d_n to generate an

estimate of the global noise standard deviation σ.

8. (Previously presented) The method of claim 7, wherein the block size is 7×7

or 5×9 pixels.

9. (Previously presented) The method of claim 7, wherein the steps of detecting

block saturation due to noise and compensating for the smallest standard deviation

include the steps of:

defining an upper pixel value limit UL, a lower pixel value limit LL, and a

mid value M between UL and LL,

wherein if the mean m_0 is less than the mid value M, and the smallest

standard deviation is greater than a difference between the mean m_0 and the lower limit

LL, then saturation has occurred at the lower limit LL, and the smallest standard deviation

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d_0 is compensated by adding thereto a compensation term that is a function of the smallest standard deviation d_0 and said difference between the mean m_0 and the lower limit LL, to generate the compensated smallest standard deviation $\tilde{d}_0$;

else if the mid value M is less than the mean m_0, and the smallest standard deviation d_0 is greater than the difference between the upper limit UL and the mean m_0, then saturation has occurred at the upper limit UL, and the smallest standard deviation d_0 is compensated by adding thereto a compensation term that is a function of the smallest standard deviation d_0 and the difference between the upper limit UL and the mean m_0, to generate the compensated smallest standard deviation $\tilde{d}_0$;

otherwise, no saturation has occurred, wherein $\tilde{d}_0 = d_0$.

10. (Previously presented) The method of claim 7, wherein the steps of detecting block saturation due to noise and compensating for the smallest standard deviation include the steps of determining the following:

where UL is an upper pixel value limit, LL is a lower pixel value limit, M is a mid pixel value, and $UL < M < LL$, if the mean $m_0 < M$ and the smallest standard deviation $d_0 > m_0 - LL$, then saturation has occurred at the lower limit LL, wherein d_0 is compensated as $\tilde{d}_0 = d_0 + K \cdot (d_0 - (m_0 - LL))$, such that K is a compensation factor;

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else if the mean $m_0 \geq M$ and the smallest standard deviation

$d_0 > UL - m_0$, then saturation has occurred at the upper limit UL, wherein d_0 is

compensated as $\widetilde{d}_0 = d_0 + K \cdot (d_0 - (UL - m_0))$;

otherwise, no saturation has occurred, wherein $\widetilde{d}_0 = d_0$.

11. (Previously presented) The method of claim 10, wherein $LL = 0$, $UL = 255$,

and $M = 128$.

12. (Previously presented) The method of claim 7, wherein the step of selecting

the block standard deviations includes the steps of selecting the block standard deviation

d_n for averaging if $|d_n - \widetilde{d}_0| < \max(\widetilde{d}_0, 1)$.

13. – 16. (Canceled).

17. (Previously presented) A noise reduction system for reducing noise in a digital

image comprising pixels, the system comprising:

a global statistics module that computes global statistics from the image;

a local statistics module that computes local statistics for each of a

plurality of image pixels including a given pixel;

a filter configuration module that uses the local and global statistics for

the given pixel to configure a local filter for filtering the given pixel;

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the local filter as configured by the filter configuration module, being

adapted for filtering the given pixel to reduce image noise, wherein the local statistics

module computes the local statistics for the given pixel by:

selecting a window containing the given pixel and a plurality of

neighboring pixels;

computing a 2-D local variance of said pixel based on information related

to the pixels in the window;

computing a plurality of 1-D local variances along multiple directions

each defined by a pair of the pixels in the window; and

detecting a local edge direction for the given pixel by selecting one of the

directions with the smallest 1-D local variance,

wherein the global statistics module estimates a global noise standard

deviation σ to generate the global statistics,

wherein the filter configuration module configures the local filter for each

pixel using the local and global statistics by:

selecting a detected local edge direction L as the direction of the local

filter;

for the detected local edge direction L computing a 1-D filter strength as a

function of the square root of the local variance and the global noise standard deviation;

computing a 2-D filter strength as a function of a local variance and a

global noise standard deviation; and

configuring the local filter for the detected local edge direction L based on

the 1-D and 2-D filter strengths.

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18. (Previously presented) The system of claim 17, wherein the filter configuration module configures the local filter for each pixel using the local and global statistics by:

selecting the detected local edge direction L_k ($k = 1, 2, 3,$ or 4) as the direction of the local filter;

for the detected local edge direction L_k,

computing the 1-D filter strength $\alpha_k = \min(2\sigma, \max(3\sigma - \sigma_k, 0))/(2\sigma)$

wherein σ is the global noise standard deviation, and σ_k is the square root of the local variance ($k = 1, 2, 3,$ or 4), and the 2-D filter strength

$\alpha_0 = \min(2\sigma, \max(3\sigma - \sigma_0, 0))/(2\sigma)$ wherein σ_0 is a square root of a 2-D local variance; and

configuring the local filter f_k for the detected local edge direction L_k according to the following conditions:

(i)   if the detected direction is L_1, then f_1 is configured as a 2-D local filter for horizontal direction, wherein:

$$f_1 = \frac{1}{9}\begin{bmatrix} \alpha_0 & \alpha_0 & \alpha_0 \\ \alpha_0 + 3\alpha_1(1-\alpha_0) & \alpha_0 + 3(3 - 2\alpha_1)(1-\alpha_0) & \alpha_0 + 3\alpha_1(1-\alpha_0) \\ \alpha_0 & \alpha_0 & \alpha_0 \end{bmatrix};$$

(ii)   if the detected direction is L_2, then f_2 is configured as a 2-D local filter for vertical direction, wherein:

$$f_2 = \frac{1}{9}\begin{bmatrix} \alpha_0 & \alpha_0 + 3\alpha_2(1-\alpha_0) & \alpha_0 \\ \alpha_0 & \alpha_0 + 3(3-2\alpha_2)(1-\alpha_0) & \alpha_0 \\ \alpha_0 & \alpha_0 + 3\alpha_2(1-\alpha_0) & \alpha_0 \end{bmatrix};$$

(iii)   if the detected direction is L₃, then f_3 is configured as a 2-D local

filter for the diagonal direction from upper left to lower right, wherein:

$$f_3 = \frac{1}{9}\begin{bmatrix} \alpha_0 + 3\alpha_3(1-\alpha_0) & \alpha_0 & \alpha_0 \\ \alpha_0 & \alpha_0 + 3(3-2\alpha_3)(1-\alpha_0) & \alpha_0 \\ \alpha_0 & \alpha_0 & \alpha_0 + 3\alpha_3(1-\alpha_0) \end{bmatrix}; \text{ and}$$

(iv)   if the detected direction is L₄, then f_4 is configured as a 2-D local

filter for the diagonal direction from upper right to lower left, wherein:

$$f_4 = \frac{1}{9}\begin{bmatrix} \alpha_0 & \alpha_0 & \alpha_0 + 3\alpha_4(1-\alpha_0) \\ \alpha_0 & \alpha_0 + 3(3-2\alpha_4)(1-\alpha_0) & \alpha_0 \\ \alpha_0 + 3\alpha_4(1-\alpha_0) & \alpha_0 & \alpha_0 \end{bmatrix}.$$

19. (Previously presented) A noise reduction system for reducing noise in a digital

image comprising pixels, the system comprising:

a global statistics module that computes global statistics from the image;

a local statistics module that computes local statistics for each of a

plurality of image pixels including a given pixel;

a filter configuration module that uses the local and global statistics for

the given pixel to configure a local filter for filtering the given pixel;

the local filter as configured by the filter configuration module, being

adapted for filtering the given pixel to reduce image noise, wherein the local statistics

module computes the local statistics for the given pixel by:

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selecting a window containing the given pixel and a plurality of neighboring pixels;

computing a 2-D local variance of said pixel based on information related to the pixels in the window;

computing a plurality of 1-D local variances along multiple directions each defined by a pair of the pixels in the window; and

detecting a local edge direction for the given pixel by selecting one of the directions with the smallest 1-D local variance,

wherein the global statistics module estimates a global noise standard deviation σ to generate the global statistics,

wherein the input image comprises a plurality of blocks, and wherein the global statistics module further comprises:

a mean and standard deviation module that computes the mean and the standard deviation for each block ;

a minimum finder module that finds the smallest standard deviation d_0 and its corresponding mean m_0;

a saturation detector that detects block saturation due to noise;

a saturation compensator that compensates for the smallest standard deviation d_0 to generate a compensated smallest standard deviation $\tilde{d}_0$; and

a selective averaging module that selects the block standard deviations d_n that are within a range of the compensated smallest standard deviation $\tilde{d}_0$, and

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averages the selected block standard deviations d_n to generate an estimate of the global

noise standard deviation σ.

20. (Previously presented) The system of claim 19, wherein the block size is 7×7

or 5×9 pixels.

21. (Previously presented) The system of claim 19, wherein:

an upper pixel value limit is denoted UL, a lower pixel value limit is

denoted LL, and a mid value M is between UL and LL,

wherein the saturation detector determines if the mean m_0 is less than the

mid value M, and the smallest standard deviation is greater than a difference between the

mean m_0 and the lower limit LL, indicating that saturation has occurred at the lower limit

LL, and if so, the saturation compensator compensates for the smallest standard deviation

d_0 by adding thereto a compensation term that is a function of the smallest standard

deviation d_0 and said difference between the mean m_0 and the lower limit LL, to

generate the compensated smallest standard deviation $\tilde{d}_0$;

else if the saturation detector determines that the mid value M is less than

the mean m_0, and the smallest standard deviation d_0 is greater than a difference between

the upper limit UL and the mean m_0, indicating saturation has occurred at the upper limit

UL, the saturation compensator compensates for the smallest standard deviation d_0 by

adding thereto a compensation term that is a function of the smallest standard deviation

d_0 and said difference between the upper limit UL and the mean m_0, to generate the

compensated smallest standard deviation $\tilde{d}_0$;

otherwise, no saturation has occurred, wherein $\tilde{d}_0 = d_0$.

22. (Previously presented) The system of claim 21, wherein:

if the mean $m_0 < M$ and the smallest standard deviation $d_0 > m_0 - LL$,

indicating saturation has occurred at the lower limit LL, then d_0 is compensated for as

$\tilde{d}_0 = d_0 + K \cdot (d_0 - (m_0 - LL))$, such that K is a compensation factor;

else if the mean $m_0 \geq M$ and the smallest standard deviation

$d_0 > UL - m_0$, indicating saturation has occurred at the upper limit UL, then d_0 is

compensated for as $\tilde{d}_0 = d_0 + K \cdot (d_0 - (UL - m_0))$;

otherwise, no saturation has occurred, wherein $\tilde{d}_0 = d_0$.

23. (Previously presented) The system of claim 22, wherein $LL = 0$, $UL = 255$,

and $M = 128$.

24. (Previously presented) The system of claim 19, wherein the block standard

deviations d_n are selected for averaging if $|d_n - \tilde{d}_0| < \max(\tilde{d}_0, 1)$.